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DISCOURSES

ON

PREACHING:

OR,

DIRECTIONS

Towards attaining to the best Manner of
discharging the Duties of the Pulpit:

DELIVERED, IN THREE

VISITATION - CHARGES,

By THOMAS SHARP, D.D.

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Prebendary of *Durham*.

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To the Reverend the Clergy of the
 Archdeaconry of *Northumberland*,
 and of the peculiar Jurisdiction of
 the Dean and Chapter of *Durham*.

Rothbury, Aug. 5, 1757.

I Need not make any apology for sending
 to each of you the following *Discourses*,
 of which I beg your acceptance.

Yet, to have sent them to you without any
 reason prefixed to them, or without my
 compliments accompanying them, might
 justly have been interpreted an omission in
 me.

You are not altogether strangers to them
 or their design, having once heard them
 publicly spoken. But, as you are not ac-
 quainted with the reasons, *Why they were at*
first introduced into your audience, or, why they
now attend you at your own doors, I shall beg
 leave, in a few words, to apprise you of the
 motives of my conduct in both these respects.

The *Substance*, or *principal Contents*, of them
 were first put into writing, near ten years
 ago, for the use of one who had just entered
 into orders, and for whose success and credit

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in the ministry I had a more than ordinary concern.

And to him they were propounded and recommended under the title of *PREACHING-RULES*, or Directions towards the attaining to the *best Manner* of discharging the Duties of the Pulpit, *viz. That Manner* which has been, and is, generally used by the most celebrated and approved Preachers among *the English Divines*.

These Rules were XXX in number: Comprised in II *Clases*: XX whereof were *Directions* to be observed in the *composing* of Sermons, and the other X in the *delivery* of them.

They were in this first draught little better than a Collection of detached or independent Remarks on the several *Modes of Preaching*, and on the Preference of some to others, which had been made, at different times, and on divers occasions, partly by myself, and partly by such of my acquaintance as I knew to be curious in their observations, and judicious in their reflections, on this subject. These, I say, were thrown together, at that time, negligently enough, *i.e.* without much regard to order or connection.

But, some years after, (that I may now explain how they came to be laid before you,) when I was considering of something proper to say to you at our Meeting in the *Ordinary Visitation* in 1755, *A Thought arose*, favoured perhaps

perhaps by fancy rather than by judgement, that you might be entertained (for so I imagined) with a recital of these *Pulpit-Advices*, especially of those among them which seemed less obvious to common apprehension. And I so far indulged the conceit, as to resolve to make a trial how they would appear if they were somewhat better disposed and methodised, and put, if that could be done, into the form of one or more *Charges*; not without some reasonable and pleasing presumption also, that, notwithstanding there were many of you whom I could not pretend to instruct in these things, and from whom the most I could hope for was, that they would take no offence at such *Advices* being offered, — Yet there were likewise several, among the younger *Clergy*, who were still closely employed in *Composition*, and had neither hitherto attained a sufficient stock of *Sermons*, nor had formed, by custom and practice, a settled mode or habit of *Delivery*: To whom consequently these *Preaching-Rules* might be of real use and benefit; at least so far as a bare recital of them (for nothing more was thought of then) might be supposed to contribute to that good end.—Therefore, under a persuasion that I might be serviceable to *some*, without falling, at the same time, under censure from *others*, who wanted no informations of this kind, I at length sorted and distributed the aforesaid *Rules* or *Advices* into III Discourses,

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courses, which I ventured to deliver to you by way of *Charge* at my three last *Visitations*.

And on this occasion it was, that I not only gave to these Rules a new disposition, and a better show of Order and Connexion than they had before, but reduced their number to XVIII for *Composition*, and VI for *Pronunciation*. Yet, in other respects, I made little or no alteration in them. Which last circumstance I the rather mention, as it best accounts for my not having preserved that *Gravity of Style* throughout, wherewith you have been usually addressed at our public Meetings: There being, in these Discourses, not only *several phrases*, but *some comparisons* also, which may seem rather too light for the Solemnity of a *Charge*. Perhaps, likewise, *some exemplifications* of the Rules (as particularly those in the Article of *Style*, which are brought to shew how much better *some sort of expressions* suit the pulpit than *others* do) may appear scarce of consequence enough to have been inserted in these *Discourses* when delivered in your presence. — And yet, *My Brethren*, (for, this is all the excuse I have to make for them,) considering how much these kinds of illustrations by *similes*, *allusions*, and *examples of propriety* in certain phrases and expressions, though they may carry, at first sight, some appearance of levity, or too low condescension to minute things; nevertheless, I say, considering how much they help towards

towards imprinting the Rules themselves in the Memory, (which in this case would want all the helps that could be given it;) I was in hopes they would be thought, *on that account*, the more pardonable, and so retained *all* or *most* of them as I found them in my first draught, which was designed for private use.

And that these *Discourses* are now at length *presented* to you in another dress, in which *some* of you might not expect to have seen them, *viz.* *under types*, is intirely owing to a request, that *others* of your Body, at my last Visitation, were pleased to make, *that I would print them*. A request to which I was unwilling to give *an absolute denial*, and yet with which *I could not comply altogether*, or in the full extent of it. And therefore, after some deliberation, taking a middle way, I have, *without publishing them*, procured from the press *as many copies* as may suffice to bear my respects to each of you at your own lodgings; that, upon a second and closer view of them, you may form a better judgement concerning them, and, by having them in your own possession, recourse may, at any time, be more easily had to them by those who conceive any advantage may be made of them. Or, whether *any benefit* may be expected from them or not, yet they may possibly afford *some amusement* to you; or, if they shall not afford even *that*, still I flatter myself they will be kindly received, from the good

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good intention of the donor, and in testimony of the real regards for you which are professed by

Your affectionate Brother,

And faithful Servant,

THO. SHARP.

VISI-

VISITATION-CHARGE, *Anno 1755.*

DISCOURSE I.

Reverend Brethren,

THAT the meetings of the Clergy on these occasions, when there is no extraordinary matter to be communicated to them, may not pass for mere forms, or useless conventions, it has been usual to say something, either of the doctrine or discipline of the established Church, or of the duties of the parochial Clergy, or on some other topic, relative either to our order or office, or to the ecclesiastical authority that is now exercised within this realm.

For my own part, instead of general Exhortations, or *Charges* strictly so called, and which, when addressed to the Clergy, must, in the nature of them, principally consist in injunctions and monitions to fidelity and diligence in their function, and which, in consequence, come with the best grace from those who are invested with episcopal authority and dignity; I say, instead of these solemn kind of admonitions, I have always chosen to single out of the several clerical subjects some point, of lesser moment indeed, perhaps there-

fore less attended to, yet not undeserving the attention of the parochial Minister. And I chuse always to propound what I have to represent, not in an authoritative form, but rather in a brotherly manner, by way of seasonable advice.

With this view, and under this disposition, I shall enter upon a subject which I have never touched upon in any of my former Discourses on these occasions, *viz.* *Concerning the best Manner of discharging our Office in the Pulpit:* Or concerning that Mode of Preaching, which, among many that are used, seems most subservient to edification, *i. e.* most aptly suited to influence our hearers with good effects.

I do not mean to form any just or regular Discourse on a subject with which you are already well acquainted, and which hath been very accurately examined into, and copiously discussed by celebrated writers, (such as *Salignac* and *Gisbert*, though indeed their *Rules* and *Advices* are, generally speaking, much better adapted to the *French* taste and mode of preaching than to ours:) But shall content myself with giving you a few *Advertisements*, (as Queen *Elizabeth* called her *Articles* about Preaching,) or certain *Items*, of what seems to be the most material to be considered and observed by the *English* Preacher.

You must be very sensible, and I ought to be more so, of the delicacy wherewith such a point

a point should be handled in your presence, and especially by one who can make but small pretences of any success that may have attended his own practice in following those Rules he would recommend. Yet this should not hinder or deter me from freely communicating to you such *Advertisements*, or *Preaching-Rules*, as have, either by way of private and friendly advice, been given occasionally to myself, or fallen accidentally in my way, and been picked up, at different times, in conversation with eminent Divines and long-practised Preachers: And which, whether they have had any good effects upon myself or not, were yet, I confess, very acceptable to me, and therefore may not perhaps prove otherwise to you. And, if they shall appear to you under the same agreeable light they did to me, I trust that, on farther reflection upon them, you will also judge them useful.

There are *two General Heads* under which the several particular *Advices* must be ranged.

The first is *Composition*,

Under which term are included *Style*, *Invention*, and *Method*.

The other is *Pronunciation*,

Or what we commonly call *Delivery*; including the whole power, and all the graces, of *Elacion*.

Which last branch of the art of preaching is not, I fear, so well studied and attended to

by many of our Order as one could wish it were. Though, as to *Composition*, it is commonly thought no Clergy upon earth do *excel* our countrymen in it, if they can be said to *equal* them.

However, that I may proceed in some order and method, I must begin with my *Advertisements* concerning *Composition*: And I shall at this time briefly lay down the capital and most approved Rules for forming or regulating the preacher's style, or the language of the pulpit.

I. The grand Maxim, by which we are to be guided in all those *Compositions* which are distinguished by the name of *Sermons*, is this, *viz.* *That they are verbal Instructions*, designed to be taken by the ears of the persons instructed, and are not originally formed to be read by their eyes: Therefore, like all other addressees to an audience, if not understood at first hearing, are good for nothing. What may well pass in a written discourse, on which the eye may dwell, will not do so in a Sermon *under delivery*; because that admits not of any stop for reflexion. Therefore, the first character of a good preacher, in point of *Style*, is, that he be understood by every body as the words come out of his mouth.

For the better attainment of which primary qualification, the second Rule comes seasonably in aid, *viz.*

II. *Long Sentences, in Sermons, to be avoided* as much as possible. They are too large for the swallow of ordinary capacities. But, break them into three or four distinct sentences, and they will all easily be taken down, and all will become food.

Concise expressions, provided they be also plain and clear, will make their way where long and laboured periods cannot enter.

Good sentences are sometimes lost, because they are not heard; the unhappy consequence of a low voice, or of an irregular unequal pronunciation. But good sentences are oftener lost, (at least among the vulgar,) because, when heard, they are not immediately understood: And this frequently proceeds from too great copiousness and exuberancy of expression. Whereas *rotundity*, and every other beauty of *Style*, is, at any time, to be given up for the sake of *perspicuity*.

The common people, indeed, are apt to call what they cannot understand *high Divinity*. But they, who give occasion to them to use this phrase, will be placed, by considerate men, among preachers of *low rank*.

Another Rule, greatly subservient to *perspicuity*, is,

III. *Never to keep a principal Word in a Sentence at a Distance*, if it can be brought out early; or, to express it otherwise, *Never to leave the Hearer in Suspence to the very End of*

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of the Sentence, if you can let him into the meaning of it as you proceed in it.

If I should now say, for instance, — This Observation which I am making is not only consistent with, and agreeable to, but indeed results from, the foregoing Rules, — This would be justly called Stammering in Style. For, the plain and unembarrassed language, or the sentence properly continued, would run thus : — This Observation is consistent with the foregoing Rules, and is agreeable to them ; and, not only so, but indeed it results from them. — I know such-like Dislocations of principal words are common in writers, who use them as ornaments of language. But they do not suit with the style of the Pulpit ; in which, I think, it is an universal Rule, that the Sentiment to be conveyed must never be hurt, impaired, or obscured, for the sake of embellishing the Sentence that conveys it.

IV. A fourth Rule is, to speak for the most Part in the Concrete rather than in the Abstract: That is, to unite agents with their actions, and not to separate habits and qualities from the persons that possess them.

Ex. gr. Instead of saying, Piety and Virtue will bring joy and happiness in the end ; and Sin, however triumphant for a season, will finally bring forth misery and sorrow ; say rather, — A pious and good Man will rejoice and be happy in the end ; and Sinners, however they

they may triumph for a season, will be finally miserable and wretched.

The Sentiment, or Doctrine, is the *very same* in both cases; and perhaps the former phraseology may be held more *polite*: Yet there is something in the latter which brings the Sentiment more home to the ordinary man's mind, and is therefore the more proper for the Pulpit.

And it is no small recommendation of this Rule, that our blessed Saviour commonly spake in the *Concrete*, very rarely in the *Abstract*.

And these four Rules above-mentioned are chiefly to be attended to in the *instructive* or *didactic* parts of a Discourse; whereas the *pathetic* or *persuasive* Parts of a Sermon not only allow, but require, a greater liberty in language to be taken. Here *tropes* and *figures* may be more safely admitted, and all the *arts of Oratory* displayed: And here it is, the *Talent of Eloquence*, where there is one, ought principally to be exercised. Which brings me to the 5th Rule.

V. *To make a suitable Difference between the Style that is employed in the Pathetic and that which is used in the Didactic.* For, one and the same form of construction will not agree equally well with both, any more than one and the same mode of utterance and delivery can be used with equal propriety in both.

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The whole Art of *Composition*, in the *instructive* part, lies in putting truths or sentiments into such an order, and into such expressions, as will carry them into the *understanding* of every attentive person: While the Art of *Persuasion* lies rather in speaking to the *heart*, and conveying thither the most interesting and affecting motives, by engaging and insinuating language.

But, neither the *didactic* nor the *pathetic* should be continued long at a time. Tedious Instructions dull the attention, and tedious Addresses cloy the mind.

They do best when properly intermixed. But only the instructive Part must still go first: For, the *Head* must be properly *informed* before the *Heart* can be properly *warmed*.

VI. The sixth Rule relates to the decency and modesty of Style, *viz.* *To avoid with Care whatever borders upon the Pedantic*, and not to depreciate good reasoning by enforcing it magisterially.

Preachers should not appear as *Disputants*, nor carry themselves as *Preceptors*; they should rather put on the character of Counsellors and friendly Advisers.

To dictate or dogmatize in an overbearing way, though with truth in one's mouth, renders that truth less acceptable.

It is also a foolish Confidence to do so at a time, or in a place, where nobody may contradict one. For, whoso insists, in the pulpit,

pit, on what he says being unanswerable, or challenges the world to defeat his Argument, (which yet, strictly speaking, he oftentimes might justly and safely do,) yet nevertheless, to do so in these circumstances, and before a silent audience, is giving much the same proof of his skill in reasoning that the King's Champion doth of his prowess in arms, when he makes his challenge, at the coronation, before the unarmed multitude.

To which let me add another Rule, relative also to Decency in Style, and that is,

VII. Seventhly, *To avoid, as much as may be, Egoisms, or the speaking any thing in the Pulpit upon one's own private judgement or authority.*

Monsieur Pascal wished that the pronouns *I* and *Me* were banished out of conversation; intimating the disagreeableness of drawing *Self* too often into common subjects. And what he observed holds stronger for discarding these terms in the Pulpit. For, although in transitions, and on some other occasions, they come in naturally, and are used inoffensively, as, — *I shall discourse, — Consider with me, — I shall proceed next, or, — Let me now conclude, —* and the like; yet, in other places, and on other occasions, they are much better dropped than us'd. As, for instance, instead of saying, with an *Egoist*, — *I cannot come into this Exposition, — I cannot say I see the force of this Argument, —* speak rather, to the same

effect, in these or the like words: — *This Exposition is not to be admitted; it is not easy to see where the Force of this Argument lies;* — and so on, in other like instances.

Indeed our Saviour's Discourses do abound with *Egoisms*; because he taught as one having authority, both to correct the received Doctrines which needed improvement, and also to teach new Doctrines of his own. And, when we shall meet with another infallible Guide, or Interpreter, we shall readily allow him his *Egoisms* too.

And so much for *Style*, or the *Rules of Expression.*

I have not time to proceed now to the other Articles that fall under this Head of *Composition*, viz. *Invention* and *Method*: Two things of very great use in framing our Discourses for the Pulpit; and which will admit of very easy and practicable Rules, as may perhaps be shewn hereafter, if we live to meet again.

At present, let the following Observation shut up what has been now said upon *Style*, viz. that young preachers are but too apt to be solicitous about elegance in their phrases, and study to be *polite* in all their expressions; and sometimes *polish* them *so high*, that vulgar hands can lay no hold on them; and, frequently, by these means, they not only overdress their Arguments, but give an unnatural stiffness to their whole Composition; where-
as

as old preachers are generally so sensible of these mistaken notions and misplaced labours, that they commonly grow sick of their own juvenile Compositions, and scarce know how to bring them up again into the pulpit; at least without some proper retrenchment of the redundances, and such a chastening of the luxuriances of their youthful fancies, as a maturer judgement, formed upon practice, requires them to make. Which Knowledge and Judgement from experience (I believe an Experience generally avowed) gives great Confirmation to several of the Rules which have been now recommended: — Recommended, you will remember, to your consideration only, and not to your practice, farther than you shall, in your own prudence, think it adviseable to follow them.

VISITATION-CHARGE, *Anno 1756.*

DISCOURSE II.

Reverend Brethren,

THOUGH I must not flatter myself with thinking, that what I say to you, on these occasions, deserves much to be remembered, yet the Subject I took in hand the last Year will scarce be so soon forgotten, but that you may retain some general Idea of the *Advices* then given you concerning Compositions for the pulpit; and particularly concerning the Rules by which a preacher may best form his *Style*.

There remain a few Advices more, concerning *Invention* and *Method* in composition, which I had not time then to communicate; but which it is hoped you will now hear with the same patience and candour with which you before attended to the Rules for *Style*.

And, that they may appear less tedious to you, I shall not only use what Brevity I can in the recital of them, but shall give you them in their original Dress, as they were first drawn up and prepared for the better helping of the memory. On which account alone, I persuade myself, you will the more readily

readily excuse some of the quaint Terms made use of, and some of the Comparisons which are introduced; not out of any ludicrous Turn of Fancy, but merely for the sake of fixing in the mind those Rules which they serve at the same time to illustrate.

Touching Invention, the Advices are these.

I. *Never to think one's self obliged, on any Subject, to say all that one can say,* (as Lawyers do, and properly enough, when they plead in Court for Fees,) but to content one's self in the pulpit with saying what is most pertinent, most useful and instructive to the auditors.

And, in consequence of this,

II. *Never to pursue any Subject over-curiously into its Minutenesses,* which is a Species of Wire-drawing. The Reason is, because Composers are too apt, in such pursuits, to over-run and get beyond clear Ideas, and to spin their Thread so fine as to lose sight of it themselves. Or, if they think they still see it themselves, yet they should remember that the major Part of their Audience have no Sight at all for fine Threads: And, to talk out of sight is the same in effect with talking in the dark; which, whensoever we seem to be in Danger of doing, it is best to give over, and to return to what is plain and intelligible, and suited to edification.

III. *Never to employ Invention in explicating Things that are already plain:* For, this is the Way

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Way to make those Things less plain than they were before, at least to vulgar capacities.

As for instance: What Conscience or Reason by its common lights inwardly preaches to people, we have no need to teach, but only to remind them of. For, these divine Admonitions have so far prepared our way, that we use their Dictates as so many *Axioms* from which we deduce other Truths, as *Mathematicians* do their *Theorems*.

To which may I add, in the 4th place,

IV. *The same Rule holds against Attempts to explain such Things as in their own Nature cannot be comprehended by us, or made out more clearly than they already are in the Word of God.*

And thus revealed Mysteries come under the notion of inexplicable maxims, to which we can no more, by the Help of Invention, add light, or give weight, than we can to truths that are intuitive.

Therefore, on all such Points, whether of natural Religion, resting principally on conscience, or revealed Religion, resting wholly on faith, no good was ever done, in popular Assemblies, by any supposed Improvements from *Invention*. Philosophers and Scholastics will and may debate among themselves as they please upon such first Principles; but Preachers must not enter into any of their Subtleties, lest they should confound men's common

common Ideas of known truths by unnecessary Refinements.

But, then, although the great Truths of Religion and Morality require neither Enlargement nor Decoration from *Invention*, but need only to be fairly stated, or pointed out, because, when attended to, they will make their own way by their own weight; yet,

V. *Invention is of prime Use and Service in conducting the auxiliary Arguments, and in bringing up the Rear of motives and persuasives to practice.*

When we come, for instance, to enforce a natural Obligation, or a plain Scripture Duty, with special Inducements from reason and experience, then we may range freely through all the Topics of Invention, and ransack the Magazines of the Orators to find proper matter for our purpose.

And, indeed, were we to go on no farther than the three common logical Topics, *Cur, quomodo, & quando*, for reasons *why* a Thing is to be done, and for directions *how* and *when* it is to be done, they will amply furnish us with Matter on most Subjects, and especially the practical ones. Upon which I would just take notice of how great Consequence to Edification the Topic *Quomodo* is, or the instructing people *how* any Duty is to be performed: This being a far more useful Lesson to them, and perhaps a more difficult Task for us, than the satisfying them *why* or

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or wherefore a Thing ought to be done: And therefore, of all the *Loci communes*, to which we have recourse, there is none in which we can more profitably employ ourselves than in this. Every serious and good Man will be apt to gather something on this Topic from his own experience, and will be able to explain the *How* from his own Feelings, and from reflections on his own private Conduct, more usefully to others, and more satisfactorily to himself, than by any other Method of Invention. And happy is he whose heart and conscience can furnish him with a *Probatum* of the *Prescription* that he gives to others.

And, to these *Common-Places*, which are called *the logical*, let me subjoin,

VI. In the sixth Place, a sacred Topic, peculiarly useful to those who compose for the pulpit, *viz. Scripture Examples*; of which great Benefit may be made, when they are properly selected, and discreetly accommodated to the business in hand. They weigh much with the vulgar, and are easily remembered.

But, one of the largest Funds of *Invention* is that of,

VII. *Similitudes, Comparisons, Emblems, &c.* Which are greatly recommended by our Saviour's manner of instructing the common People, by parables, by allusions to natural *Phænomena*, by sundry images taken from things

things of daily use in life, and even by proverbs and vulgar sayings. All which he made beautifully subservient to the Illustration of his Doctrines.

Only let it be observed, on this Article of *Similes*, that there ought to be a due Share of discernment to distinguish what are proper for a Sermon and what are not so. For, as Fancy is boundless, so are fanciful Comparisons.

As I remember, we had, at the University, a peculiar Term for extravagant Conceits of this kind in the compositions of preachers, I think we called them *white Bears*; meaning thereby, such *Emblems*, or *Similes*, as were too bold and striking to be easily forgotten; and yet, from some strange Impropriety or Oddness in them, could not be remembered but with discredit to the brains that formed them.

Nevertheless Similitudes, prudently chosen and sparingly interspersed, are not only great Ornaments to a Discourse, but have special Effects, both in illustrating a Doctrine and imprinting it on the mind. And these, I apprehend, are the most material Advices concerning Invention.

Indulge me now in a word or two upon *Method*.

Every Man, you will say, must take his own. True.

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True

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True also that no one Method of Composition whatsoever can be prescribed that will suit with all subjects and all occasions.

Yet, on the other hand, it is no less true that there are *some general Rules*, from which we must never depart, if we would have our Compositions pass for *methodical*.

I. As, first. *To abide by the Subject, whatever it be*, and not to stray or wander from it into points that are not allied to it.

This is commonly called, *keeping close to the Text*. Of which good Rule some preachers are so little observant, that, whatever Text they set out with, they will nevertheless run their chace through the Bible, as if they thought nothing was out of method that was but in Scripture, from *Genesis* even to the *Revelations*.

Such Ramblers, from their assumed subject, are styled, and not improperly, — *Universal Preachers*. Of which sort, generally speaking, are the *extempore Men*; and for a very obvious reason: More obvious than any that is to be given for the like Digressions in those who pen their Discourses, and have time to weigh and sort their Materials, and to dispose them into such form and order, that the several Parts of the Composition may be adjusted to each other, and every part may be made to contribute to the strength of the whole.

II. But, secondly. It is hardly consistent with Method, never with good Method, to make Excursions into Branches even of the same Subject, if the Consideration of those branches be not authorized by the text itself. For, as Discourses are to be confined to the subjects that are treated of in them, so Subjects themselves are to be limited by the texts that are taken for them: Unless perchance the Subject itself happens to be some *modern Argument, State-Topic, or other occasional Thesis*, to which no text in Scripture hath any direct or immediate reference: In all which extraordinary cases, as we must never think to make any Text speak what was not originally intended in it, we must content ourselves with such touches upon it, or allusions to it, as may preserve an Idea of Relation, though perhaps not a close one, between *the Sermon and the Text*. But,

III. Of several Methods that may be used, *that* will always appear to be the best, whereby the Subject contained in the Text may be the easiest understood, and the Discourse made upon it the easiest remembered.

And it matters not whether this Disposition be made by regular and formal Divisions into Heads, or by any other artificial Disposition of the several Arguments, for the better engaging the attention at present, and the better helping the memory afterwards.

Some Preachers too fancifully adhere to a method of splitting into heads, and into a certain number of them too, on most occasions. I do not mean hereby to blame them; for, what is in *Method*, and due Order, is, generally speaking, well. But yet this Rule of splitting may oftentimes be changed into a better; and especially on those Occasions where the Preacher takes upon himself the Part of an Orator: Under which Character, the Concealment of Method often proves an Advantage to the Address. For a Discourse, we know, may be full of art and contrivance, and even elegantly *methodical*, and yet shall seem, as least to the unlearned, to have no traces of skill discoverable in it. But the Victories of Eloquence are sometimes obtained, like those of great Captains, by playing off the concealed Batteries; whereby the Audience is more successfully smitten than when the whole Tire of Artillery is discovered beforehand.

You will still remember, that I am only giving you some general Hints of Points which may be pursued at leisure by as many of you as are yet employed in *Compositions*, and are not already furnished with a Stock of Discourses sufficient for the demands of your stations and cures. To work by Rule, when we do work, is much better than following Fancy and Imagination: Nay, much better than endeavouring merely to imitate others,

others, though they be Writers of the greatest credit and renown: Because, unless we know, and mind, and apply to, those same Rules which they followed, and which make their writings appear to such advantage, we may indeed imitate them, but really without any Resemblance; and seem to ourselves to follow them close, and yet without coming any thing the nearer to them.

I have not hitherto said any thing on a point, which the *French* Writers on *Christian Eloquence* never fail to mention. They speak of it under the highest Characters; styling it *L'Onction*, (for which we have no Word in *English*): And, as they make a distinct Article of it, it hath not fallen, so far as it relates to *Composition*, under any of the foregoing Heads.

They mean by it, as I take it, A truly religious Spirit, that reigns throughout the whole *Composition*, enlivens and sanctifies it, and betokens the Composer himself to be a sincere good Man; one that has a true Sense of what he says; who talks not merely from just ideas, but from a seasoned heart; evidencing, by the whole Turn of his Expressions, that he not only does firmly believe all that he advances, but earnestly desires his whole Audience may be also convinced of the same.

But indeed this *Unction* (if one may so render the *French*) is as discernible in that other

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other Branch of the Preacher's Character, *Pronunciation*, as it is in *Composition*; nay, perhaps sometimes it may be thought more so. You will see what is meant by it, when it is spoken in regard to *Delivery*, in my next Discourse, should it please God to give me another Opportunity of going through with my Preaching-Rules, at our meeting together on a like occasion.

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VISITATION-CHARGE, Anno 1757.**DISCOURSE III.**

Reverend Brethren,

YOU may well expect I should at length make an End of a Subject on which I have already twice addressed you; and, though I am sensible of my own Inabilities to do it justice, and treat it as worthily as it deserves; yet, as you have been pleased to attend to my Advices, such as they be, on a Subject so extremely well suited to these occasions, I had rather make a third Experiment of your candour, than fail in fulfilling my part on a point of such consequence to us all.

I shall therefore now proceed to give you the Remainder of those Rules for preaching, which I thought, and I hope, from what you have heard of them already, you think too, not to be undeserving your consideration.

My first Discourse you may recollect was wholly taken up in setting forth, in several particulars, *How our Style may be best adjusted and accommodated to the Use of the Pulpit.*

In my last, this time twelve months, I treated on *Invention and Method, and of their singular Use in framing and drawing up Sermons.*

mons. And under one or other of these heads I laid before you, as I think, all the approved Rules for *Composition*.

And the Point that comes now to be spoke to, by way of conclusion, is, *the Manner of discharging ourselves in the Pulpit, or, what we commonly call Delivery*: Which is the Art of happily executing with the tongue what is previously schemed and prepared with the pen.

And indeed this, when you consider it well, will be found a most material Article in our Subject. For, what is *Style*? what is *Invention*? what is *Method*? if there be wanting that which alone can set off and give Life and Grace to them all, *viz.* A proper *Elocution*, or a just *Delivery*?

And this, as I once before took the Liberty of intimating to you, is that part of the public Service which our *English Clergy*, — pardon the suggestion,—do not so thoroughly study as might be wished.

The late judicious Bishop of *London*, Dr. *Gibson*, who understood the Laws of the Pulpit as well as any other of ecclesiastical denomination, was very sensible of this Defect in many of our Order: And, in one of his Charges, reminds his Clergy of what *Demosthenes* is reported to have said, when he was asked, *what was the first Qualification of a good Orator*? — He answered, *Pronunciation*. — When asked again, what was the second?

cond?—he answered again, *Pronunciation*.—What the third? still *Pronunciation*: As if, without *that*, no Oration could be worth attending to.

It is true that *Pronunciation*, among the ancients, included the whole Action of the Speaker, or the Co-operation of all his members with his tongue, the more vigorously to impress his sentiments on the hearers. — Which combined Arts of Address, in the *Greek* and *Roman Orators*, were indeed to great purpose in their days, considering the Arguments they had to treat upon, the Customs and Privileges of the Courts in which they pleaded, and the Temper and Taste of their Auditors. And it is as true that with us the case is far different, and that our subjects, though they afford light and life much beyond theirs, yet would be injured by being handled with contention and vehemence: For, they are of a more delicate nature, and are best set off in *solemn composure*, or what we may more properly call, in opposition to the practised movements of the ancients, *A majestic Tranquillity*. For, Agitations of the Body, or theatrical Gestures, are a kind of *Gasconade* in the pulpit, which we readily resign to a neighbouring nation. Our people would not be pleased with such scenical Representations, or enthusiastic Behaviours; neither, if they would, ought we to encourage them in so false a taste.

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But then,—seeing we are, in a manner, obliged to lay aside the use and study of that part or mode of *Pronunciation*, which consisted in *Action*, how much greater Reason have we to cultivate and improve all the Powers of the *Tongue*, and to exercise ourselves in all the possible Graces of *Elocution*; in which the whole Art of our *Pronunciation*, or *Delivery*, must now consist?

A few general Advices on this head will be sufficient, and, I will presume, not unacceptable.

I. In the first place, I believe, you will readily agree with me, that the Use of Notes, which is a very valuable Privilege, and in many respects beneficial, was never designed to destroy the Energy, deaden the Vivacity, or even in any wise restrain the Force and Effects of a Discourse upon the audience.

How greatly then is this advantage abused, when it tempts us to read *with apathy* what ought to be spoken with as much life and spirit as if it flowed unpremeditated!

Hence comes the unlucky Distinction between *Preachers* and *Readers* of their own *Sermons*. The one speak or deliver themselves like *Advocates* at the Bar: But the other more like the *Clerk of the Court* reading the *Indictment* behind the *Table*.

Towards the Remedy of which Misuse of Notes, let it be observed, secondly,

II. That we should endeavour to preach in the manner we talk, provided we do it loud enough to be heard, and leisurely enough to be heard distinctly.

This is, in some measure, intimated in the very terms we use for this part of our ministration. *Homilies*, from the Greek word; *Sermons*, from the *Latin*; *Discourses*, *English*: All of them importing an easy familiar kind of address to the people.

And whereas there is something in every Man's Talk which is peculiar to himself, it is farther adviseable for every one, in preaching, to keep to his peculiar or usual Manner of Elocution. For, what is most natural is generally most becoming; and the taking pains to alter our customary Mode of *Pronunciation* seldom turns to good account: — Besides that, what is got by art, or by imitating others, is ever apt to be attended, more or less, with a spice of affectation.

And this Rule, being mentioned, leads us directly to another, which is,

III. *To avoid in preaching, as we do in common life, Sameness of Tone, and Sameness of Cadence.*

A Musician, that plays only on *one string*, or always in the *same key*, will never make good Music.

The Voice is capable of infinite Modulations, and ought to be exercised in all that variety that is requisite for expressing both

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the Force and Beauty of every Sentiment that is conveyed by it to the audience.

But, where this Study is quite over-looked, and this Care totally neglected, ill Customs take place, and, being continued, become at length inveterate. There are some who yet retain *the Cant* they got at school; and, what is more strange, they retain it only in the reading-desk and in the pulpit; and, being *Men in sense*, learning, and argument, are still *Boys in delivery*; repeating their Sermons, with their Books in their Hands, at *seventy*, as they did their Lessons at *seven*.

But, how well soever the *Tone* and *Cadences* may be adjusted for making the Discourse pass off agreeably, yet there is something farther necessary to a good *Delivery*, namely,

IV. *That we should observe Time and Measure in what we say, so as not to be always in the same strain, either uniformly rapid, or uniformly slow.*

For, as Compositions are not all of a piece, that is, of one and the same kind of stuff and texture throughout, but consist of parts which have a different Structure and Cast, so neither should one and the *same Measure* of Recital be used with them from the beginning to the end.

Some Passages require a swifter execution; others a more deliberate. Our fluency should be like that of the streams, which hasten over the shallows, but move slowly in deep places.

Indeed a continued Rapidity, besides its being wasteful and unthrifty, by expending much

much matter in a little time, hath other unfriendly consequences. For it doth, in appearance, put all Topics upon the level; and makes a Man seem to treat even Mysteries in Religion with the same haste and unconcern, as if he was talking about in-different things.

You may have known, perhaps, some formal Persons, who would, in their common Conversation, speak as gravely and solemnly upon a straw or a feather, as if they were treating a *Point of Divinity*. This seems absurd enough. But, it is much more so when the Case is reversed, and the most interesting Subjects are spoken of with as much negligence and precipitancy, as if the *Theme* were of no greater consequence than a feather or a straw.

Yet, what has been observed about *Tones* and *Cadences*, *Time* and *Measure*, must not interfere with the fifth Rule, which is,

V. *To preserve a sufficient Exertion of the Voice through every Part of the Discourse.*

They indeed who have weak constitutions and low voices must do as well as they can; and, what cannot be helped will never be excepted against.

But I point this Advice to others, who neither want lungs, nor have any design of sparing them, but yet, through an ill-judged mode of speaking, accustom themselves to drop or sink their Voice towards the close of

of their sentences, or suffer it to die away in their cadences; whereby they really, though undesignedly, deprive several of their Hearers of Part of their Discourse, and leave them to supply by conjecture those Remnants of the Sentences which they cannot recover by their ears. This is preaching by halves to auditors so circumstanced: It is a kind of stifling in the birth what should be delivered and brought forth complete and intire.

Let me add, that all these Rules above-mentioned hold equally good, be our natural Command of Voice more or less, being equally practicable by all of us within that sphere, or compass, be it greater or smaller, which we can audibly fill.

And now we are prepared for the sixth and last Rule, which indeed comprises all the former, and is properly the Aggregate of them all; and this I shall give you in *Tully's Definition of Pronunciation*, so far as we are concerned in it.

VI. *Pronunciatio est ex Rerum et Verborum Dignitate Vocis Moderatio.* To rule and guide the Voice by the import of the sense, and the turn of the diction: To frame and adapt it to the subject-matters we treat of, and to the words by which we describe them: To mould our Delivery into their Shapes, so far as it is capable of taking new forms, and to alter it as the topics themselves change.

Were a Man, for instance, to give his Advice to some dear friend, about points of

of the utmost moment to his family or affairs, surely he would model his Voice after another manner than if he was reading a paragraph of foreign news in the *Gazette*.

Matters of Weight must be delivered, *ex rerum dignitate*, distinctly and slowly, to those whom they concern; and with such an air of seriousness, as may best express the speaker's internal sense of their importance to be attended to; and which, in discourses concerning religion, makes a principal Part of that *unction* which the foreign Writers on this subject hold essential to the perfection of a *Christian orator*.

Thus, for instance, as often as Mention is made, in our discourses from the pulpit, of God's attributes and perfections, or of any thing that borders upon the Majesty of the Divine Being, it must be done with suitable reverence and humility: Speaking of him, *ex cathedra Christi*, as we would speak to him, *stantes ad altare*: Which gives the full Image of what I mean.

But other Things are to be handled less awfully, and with more spirit.

The Devil and Sin with an accent of indignation and aversion.

The Pretences and Scoffs of Unbelievers with an air of resentment and disdain.

But Sinners themselves (they are our brethren) are always to be spoken of with pity, shame, and concern.

God's

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God's Favours and Promises are to be exhibited with confidence, or a lively assurance.

His Threatenings and Terrors with a foreboding dread and solicitude.

Instructions are to be given with uniform clearness and distinction.

But the Persuasives are to be urged with all the variety of *pathos* that we can give them.

And then, as for Transitions and all other Sentences that serve only to connect the parts of the discourse together, let them be recited, as things of no consequence, with the utmost indifference.

I am just coming, I see, to the end of my Paper, and so must comprise as much as I can in a few words.

Such is the Benefit and Power of Art in delivery, that even a *Stop* or a *Pause* properly made, and on some occasions, shall be equivalent to a *Sentence*.

And a short Sentence, that is big with matter, and well prepared, being also emphatically spoken, shall be sometimes as significant in its Effects as a whole *Period*, or any laboured tour of words.

And a *Period*, delivered by one who is Master of *Pronunciation*, shall be better remembered, and do more good, than a whole Sermon from the mouth of another who is regardless of his *Delivery*.



